dismounted element.

Organizing a mechanized infantry company for an air assault operation requires a different approach, because the force must include two separate elements—mounted and dismounted—each with a distinct mission. If designated to conduct an air assault operation, a pure mechanized infantry company, with attachments, has between 100 and 115 soldiers assigned to it. The company is divided into four elements—air assault, mounted, headquarters, and support. The mounted force, however, must have a driver and a track commander for each vehicle, which takes 25 percent of the company's strength, not counting the headquarters and support personnel who have to stay with the vehicles. In all, then, only 65 to 70 soldiers are available for the air assault mission.

Because of the amount of equipment and firepower that must be left behind, the mounted element remains under the control of the executive officer. The company first sergeant controls the support elements and coordinates with the battalion administration and logistics center for the support of both the mounted and the dismounted forces during the mission.

The assault element is divided into three line platoons, a company headquarters, and an antiarmor section (created by detaching two Dragon gunners and a team leader from each platoon and placing them under the control of the company operations sergeant).

The antiarmor section is best used to concentrate all of the company's antiarmor fires along the major armor avenues of approach after it secures the objective, or it is used as a company reserve force during the initial assault. (The company's TOWs should be dismounted and taken along for defensive purposes only where a distinct long range enemy armor approach is available, an enemy counterattack is likely, and the landing zone is on or near the objective.)

Command and control in this kind of situation is, at best, difficult for the company commander. It is therefore wise for him to separate the mounted and dismounted elements until the linkup operation is accomplished, with each talking directly to the battalion tactical operations center. Fire support and direct fires must be tightly controlled between the air assault unit and the mounted forces. The task force commander can accomplish this best by assigning an officer in the TOC to coordinate with the air assault element and to ensure that the supporting fires are properly coordinated until the linkup has taken place.

The latter is the most important and dangerous part of the operation. Command and control at this stage is crucial. Communication between forces is vital, but an easily understood recognition signal is even more important. We found that marking panels could be used for this purpose, because they could be seen from a standoff distance of more than 1,000 meters in daylight. Smoke is not a good signal; it obscures the vision of both elements at the time visual contact is most critical.

Support operations are extremely limited simply because the task force does not have the assets to resupply its forces by air. The air assault element, therefore, must carry what it needs, and this depends on the amount of time before the ground element is expected to arrive on the objective. For a sustained operation, if the landing zone is on or near the objective, or if it will remain secured by the assault force, door bundles can be taken in by the air assault force to form a small immediate resupply base. The mounted element should carry along a basic resupply load so that when it finishes its linkup with the air assault force, the latter can be readied for its next mission as quickly as possible.

Many other aspects of this kind of mission are matters of unit SOP, mission, and the commander's intent. Our own efforts in that direction merely scratch the surface in expanding the AirLand Battlefield to give a heavy task force or division greater depth and maneuverability.

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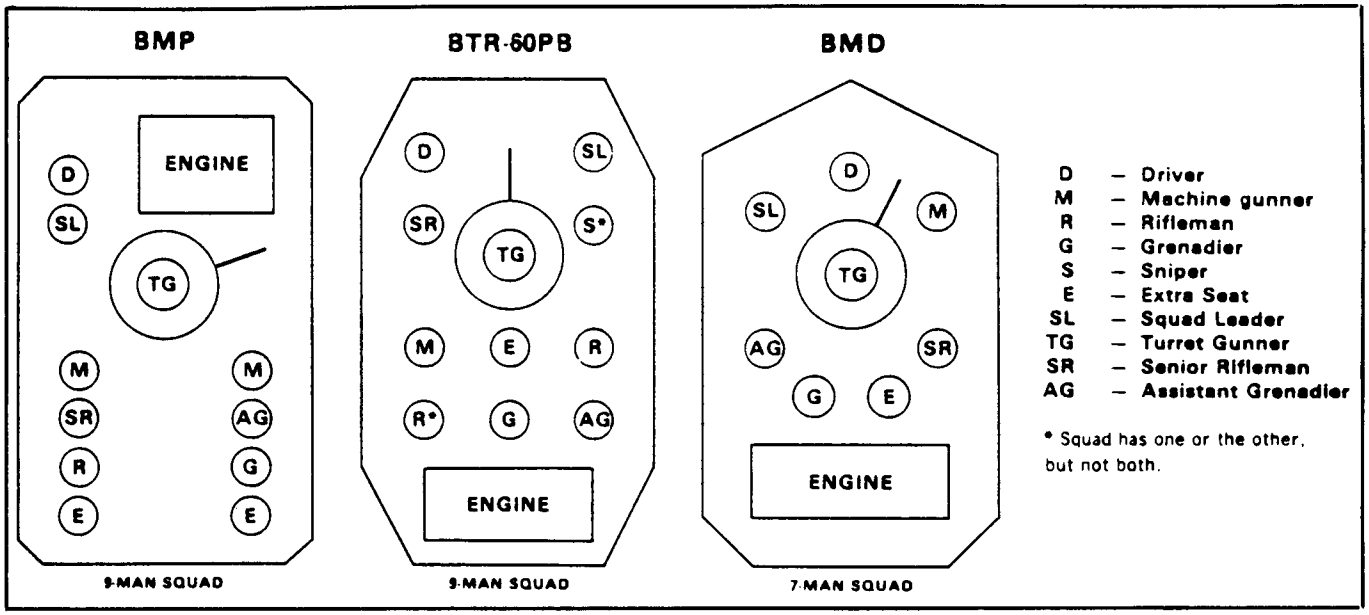
Soviet Motorized Infantry

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is another in a recurring series prepared from unclassified sources by the Threat Division, Directorate of Intelligence and Security, U.S. Army Infantry Center, at Fort Benning.

The Soviets call their infantry units "motorized rifle units." In fact, though, their firstline units meet the Soviet definition of mechanized infantry—that is, combined arms units composed of infantry equipped with armored infantry vehicles, tanks, and artillery. The lack of infantry vehicles in many of the Soviets' rear echelon division compels them to use truck-mounted infantry units or motorized infantry. This type of unit is transported in trucks or lightly armored vehicles, generally without tanks. (The Soviets do not field any light infantry units.)

The infantry squad is the basic combat element of the ground forces. As the organization and equipment of infantry formations have evolved, the number of infantrymen in the squad available for dismounted operations has decreased from 14 in 1950 to 9 in 1960 and to 7



Seating arrangements in the squad carriers.

in 1985. This has been due chiefly to the introduction of infantry vehicles and the improvements to them, which have reduced the space available for the dismount section.

Beginning with the introduction of the BMP infantry combat vehicle, the commander usually stayed with the vehicle during dismounted squad operations, and this further reduced the number of infantrymen available.

The Soviets prefer to fight mounted, but when they are forced to dismount they will lead with tanks followed by dismounted infantry supported by fire from their vehicles. The Soviets recognize that even this solution suffers from serious faults. Limiting the tanks to the speed of infantrymen advancing on foot presents the defender with slow-moving targets. Alternatively, allowing the tanks to forge ahead of the infantry might prematurely disrupt the mutually supporting fire of the tanks and infantry and would leave the tanks vulnerable to antitank weapons.

The tracked amphibious BMP, introduced in 1966, was a result of a long-standing Soviet requirement for a highly mobile armored carrier from which the infantry could fight, engage, and destroy enemy tanks. Its mobility and amphibious characteristics equip it for a sustained attack role.

In addition to its 73mm smoothbore gun, a coaxial 7.62mm machinegun, and ATGMs, the BMP carries eight soldiers with assault rifles, one with a light machinegun, and one with an RPG-7/16 grenade launcher. The rifles and machineguns can be fired through firing ports located along the sides and rear of the vehicle.

The BMP-1, an improved version of the original BMP, has become the standard version of this vehicle. Although the vehicle has not changed substantially, larger firing ports have been added and the air intake ports relocated.

In April 1981 the BMP-2, an armored combat vehicle variant appeared with Soviet forces in Afghanistan and has also been seen in East Germany.

The new weapon on this variant represents the first major armament change since the BMP's introduction. The BMP-2 has an enlarged two-man turret that mounts a 30mm automatic gun with a long, thin tube and a double-baffle muzzle brake, along with a 7.62mm coaxial machinegun on its front.

An ATGM launcher is positioned on top of the turret. The AT-5/SPANDREL missile canister is usually seen on the vehicle, but the AT-4/SPIGOT may also be used on some of the BMPs. The AT-5 has an effective range of four kilometers, while the AT-4 has a range of two kilometers. The basic onboard load is four missiles. The ATGM can also be employed in a dismounted mode. The BMP-2 also mounts three smoke grenade projectors on each side of its turret.

In addition to the improved turret armament, it is postulated that the BMP-2 may have improved armor protection.

The 30mm dual-purpose automatic gun can be used against either air or ground targets. With a maximum elevation of 74 degrees and an effective antiaircraft range of 3,000 meters, the 30mm gun is capable of engaging low-flyng, subsonic aircraft and helicopters. In the automatic mode, the gun can fire up to 550 rounds per minute, but the vehicle has only 500 rounds on board and a gunner will usually fire one-to-one-and-one-half-second bursts. For ground targets, the gunner can select either automatic or single-shot fire, with a maximum effective horizontal range of 2,000 to 4,000 meters, depending on the type of ammunition used.

The BMP-2 accommodates one less passenger than the BMP-1. Another difference is that the vehicle commander has been moved into the two-man turret with the gunner. Because of the enlarged turret, there is now room for only two roof hatches in the rear fighting compartment instead of the four on the BMP-1, and there is one less firing port on each side. There is a new firing port, however, on the left side of the hull, forward of the turret, which indicates that an infantryman now occupies the position vacated by the vehicle commander.